

<SAMPLE SUPPORT LETTER>

<Date>

The Honorable Jim Beall
Senate Health Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT SB 22 (Beall) Mental Health Compliance Act of 2013

On behalf of < **Organization name**>, I am writing to respectfully urge you to support the millions of Californians, who are suffering from mental health and substance abuse disorders, and support SB 22 (Beall), the Mental Health Compliance Act of 2013. SB 22 helps end the discrimination against people with mental health and substance use disorders. SB 22 bolsters the enforcement of federal and state parity laws that require health insurers to cover treatment for those illnesses, equivalent to the coverage provided for other medical conditions.

Despite the passage of the parity laws, access to mental health and substance use treatment remains elusive for too many Californians. Only 60 percent of people suffering mental illness actually get treatment, according to federal health officials. SB 22 would provide data that would allow regulators to enforce the law and hold insurance plans accountable.

SB 22 strengthens California's enforcement of state parity laws by measuring health insurers' compliance with in-depth data that goes beyond the mere tabulation of consumer complaints.

The bill requires health insurers to submit an annual report to the Department of Managed Health Care or the Department of Insurance to prove their compliance with documented evidence that includes surveys with consumers and providers, and other analysis. SB 22 also requires health insurers to make the annual report available to the public, principally by posting it on the insurer's website.

Currently, the lack of information available to state officials has resulted in a complaint-driven enforcement process to evaluate the effectiveness of health plan

and insurer efforts to provide access to benefits as required by law. Given the complex bureaucracy, coupled with the stigma of suffering from a substance use or mental illness disorder, it is extremely difficult to appeal denials of service, let alone file complaints. These complaint numbers are additionally skewed because it places the burden on a person who is likely grappling with a mental or substance use disorder to voluntarily file a complaint and cope with a new morass of red tape. An enforcement system largely based on consumer complaints is not appropriate nor does it accurately reflect an insurer's compliance with the law.

Finally, the passage of SB 22 saves California money. Research shows access to mental health and substance use services reduces state expenditures. A UCLA evaluation of Proposition 63 found that for each dollar spent on mental health services, the state saved roughly 88 cents in costs to the criminal justice and health systems and housing

services by reducing the number of arrests, incarcerations, hospitalizations, and emergency room use.^[i] Over the years, other studies have shown that for every dollar spent on substance use disorder treatment California saves \$7 in criminal justice, law enforcement, health and social services, and other state programs.

For all these reasons, *<I/Organization name>* strongly urge you to support SB 22 when it comes before you for a vote.

Sincerely,

<Name>

<Title>

[i] "Full Service Partnerships: California's Investment to Support Children and Transition-Age Youth with Serious Emotional

Disturbance and Adults and Older Adults with Severe Mental Illness," UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Youth and Families

(Oct. 31, 2012).